

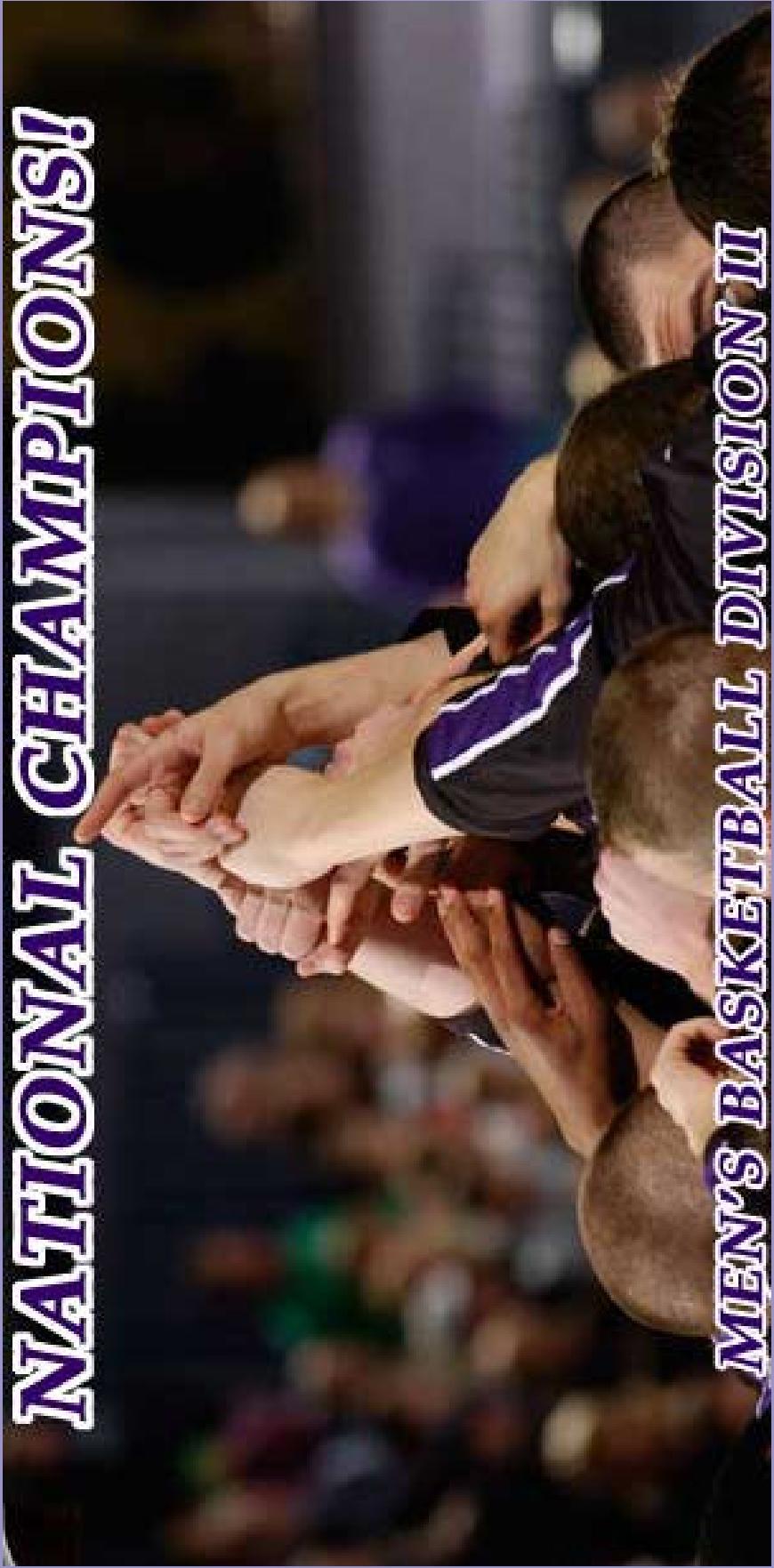
Working with the Non-Offending Caregiver

Angela Scott
Forensic Interview Specialist
APRI's National Child Protection
Training Center
507-457-2892
angela.scott@ndaa-apri.org

Adapted from Susanne Walters

Winona State University

NATIONAL CHAMPIONS!



MEN'S BASKETBALL DIVISION III

Home of the National Child Protection Training Center

Common Reactions Upon Learning of Disclosure

- Numbness - the inability to feel any emotion
- Distance - the feeling of being separated from people and events around you

Carolyn Byerly The Mother's Book

■ Disbelief

– “is this real”?

- Many parents will experience a sense of disbelief and denial similar to that of a parent who has just lost a child in a tragic accident

M. H. Myer A New Look at Mothers of Incest Victims

- **Minimizing the Seriousness –**
 - many women will tell themselves that it is not as serious as it appears

- Denial - Some mothers don't believe their children, especially if the offender denies the accusation

The Research Shows that:

Mother's generally believe their children's disclosure either totally or in part.

Elliot & Carnes (2001)

Child Maltreatment

Vol. 6, No. 4, November 2001

The Research Shows that:

The majority of mothers believe their children and take action to protect them.

Pentello & Zuravin (2001)

Child Maltreatment

Vol. 6, No. 4, November 2001

Factors that predict belief and protection by mothers

- Mother's age at the birth of first child
- Type of relationship between mother and offender
- Knowledge of the abuse before the child protection investigation
- Whether the victimized child exhibits sexualized behavior

■ Guilt & Shame

- = It was my fault
- = I should have known
- = We're so close, I can't believe he didn't tell me
- Explaining the dynamics of abuse may help
- Religious beliefs may bring comfort but it may cause some caregivers to blame themselves

■ Confusion & Doubt

- Loss of income
 - One of the single biggest factors that women allow perpetrators back in the home
- Services to help family meet financial need

- **Sexual Inadequacy or Rejection**
 - many woman feel that they were not sexually attractive enough

■ Repulsion

- Some women feel repulsed (especially sexually) by the offender

■ Jealousy

- mother may feel jealous of the sexual relationship that their child had with their husband/partner

■ Hurt & Betrayal

- a caregiver may experience hurt and betrayal by their spouse
- Other relatives
- Their child

■ Anger

- Toward everyone around them
- More focused
- Help caregiver to properly focus anger
- Provide information that is accurate and helpful
- Don't make any promises you can't keep

■ Hatred

- some caregivers experience intense hatred
for the offender
- For actions and for consequences

■ Revenge

- a strong need to “get even” with the offender
- Caregiver could go to prison for seeking revenge
- Make supervisors and attorneys aware of any threats against the perpetrator

Factors That Influence Reaction

- Was caregiver sexually abused as a child?
- How does caregiver cope with crises in general?

- What kind of relationship does the caregiver have with the child?
- Are friends/family supportive?
- Did caregiver suspect a problem?

- Cultural/religious beliefs?
- Values?
- Counseling

Common Questions from Caregivers

- **What types of behaviors should I look for?**
 - Common reactions of sexually abused children may include
 - Early sexual behavior
 - Early appearance of maturity
 - Acting out behaviors
 - Withdrawn behavior
 - Younger children may exhibit confusion or lack of trust

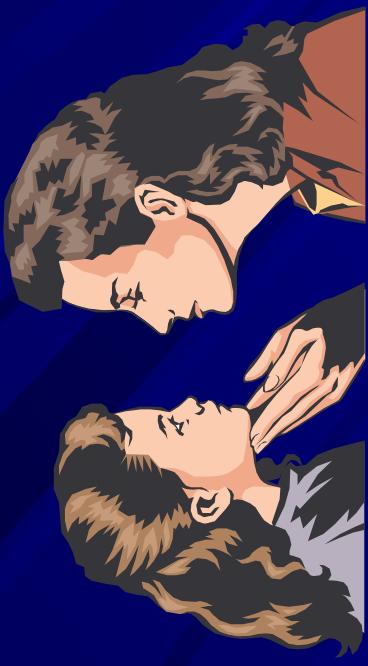
- **Sleep disorders**
- **Eating disorders**
- **Learning disabilities / high achievement
(accommodation)**
- **Low self esteem**
- **Inability to make friends**
- **Fear in many situation**

■ Does my child need counseling?

- This is an excellent opportunity to refer both the caregiver and the child for counseling

■ Should I talk to my child about what happened?

- Let the child decide when and how much to talk about their abuse
- Let the child know the caregiver will listen if they want/need to talk



- What a child needs to hear from their caregiver:
 - What happened is not the child's fault
 - Caregiver will try to protect them
 - Caregiver trusts and believes them

■ Why do I feel jealousy toward my daughter?

- More common with teen victims
- Normal reaction
- Counseling may help

■ Whose fault was this?

- You should assure the caregiver that abuse is never the child's fault.
- It is not the caregiver's fault either.



■ Why is my child so angry at me?

- “You should have known”
- “You should have protected me”
- By being supportive the caregiver can help the child to overcome their anger
- Counselling

■ How will the abuse affect my child in the future?

Age Duration Other Risk Factors
Penetration Use of Force
Relationship Maternal Support
Frequency Identity of Perpetrator

(Kendall-Tackett, Meyer Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993, p.172)

■ Will my child have sexual problems later in life?

- Some children do experience lasting effects from child sexual abuse that severely effect their sexual relationships as an adult and some do not.

■ What effect will this have on my other children?

- This is often a very confusing time for non-abused siblings.

- Jealousy
- Confusion
- Anger



■ How can I re-establish trust in my family?

- Encourage caregiver to talk about their feelings with their children and encourage children to do the same.

■ How can I keep this from happening again?

- Caregivers need a clear understanding of any court guidelines regarding contact between offender and child.
- Safety plan
- Child needs to understand the right to protect themselves.

What Mom's Say They Need Most

Studies suggest that parents who receive less social or environmental support are more distressed and less supportive of their children. Theoretically then if we offer parents services designed to increase their coping skills, they in turn will be better able to help their children.

-Elliot & Carnes Reactions of Non Offending Parents
to the Sexual Abuse of Their Child: A Review of the Literature
Child Maltreatment Vol. 6, Number 4, Nov. 2001 page 324

- Someone to talk to
- Someone to discuss their own sexual abuse with

– Who can a parent talk to?

- A trusted friend
- The victim advocate
- Support group
- Counselor

- Separation from offender to figure things out
- To be treated as a person

- The ability to make basic life decisions
- To know options regarding custody
 - To regain control of their life

- To understand how children will react
- Specific information about what happened
- Ways to safeguard children in the future

Studies show that children who feel loved and supported by their mother or other non-offending caregiver through this process will recover from the trauma more quickly.

(Kendall-Tackett, Meyer Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993, p.172)

The Non-Supportive Parent

- It is imperative to the child's well-being that a non-supportive parent be identified as soon as possible.

When the caregiver is not supportive

- If attempts to convince caregiver have failed, removing the child needs to be seriously considered.
- Leaving the child in a non-supportive environment can cause the child significant emotional harm.
- *Significantly increases the likelihood of recantation.*

Factors that influence

a parent's lack of support

- Some of the factors that may contribute to a lack of support include:
 - Cognitive Issues
 - The mother may have a negative attitude about the child or the child's behavior
 - The parent may have inaccurate knowledge or inappropriate expectations for child's developmental level
 - sometimes these feelings start during pregnancy and carry over to child's life (unwanted pregnancy)

■ Cycle of Abuse

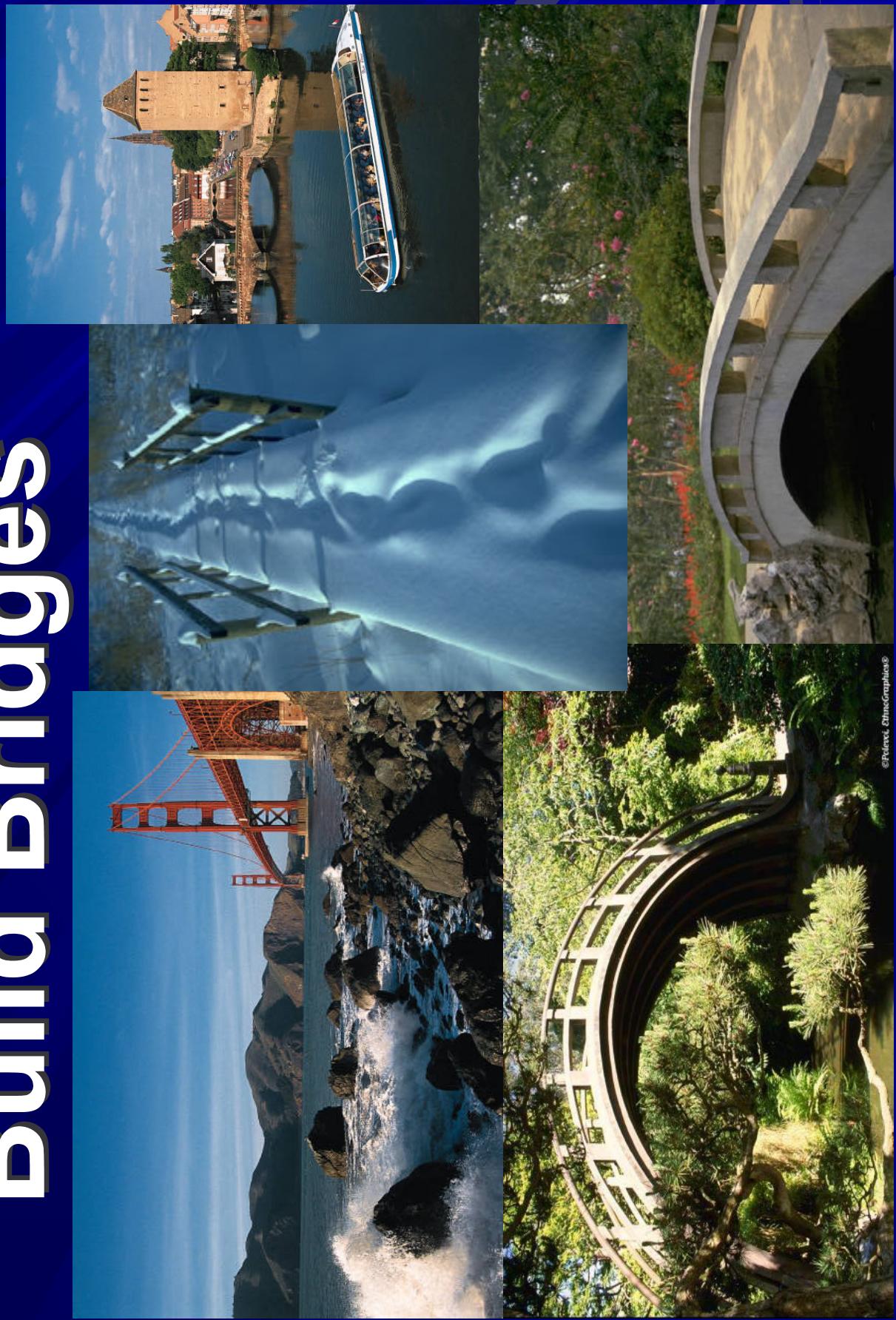
It is possible that the parent was abused as a child and is now abusive towards their own children. Mother may think this is how everyone lives. She may be also be physically abusive towards child

■ Drug Use

If the caregiver is abusing drugs they may not be emotionally able to deal with the situation and choose to disbelieve the child because it is the easiest way out.

-Leifer et al., 1993

Build Bridges



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Research Materials

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Suggested Readings

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